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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ABU DHABI 001595

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CENTCOM FOR ADMIRAL FALLON
STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARP, PM/FO
DOD/OSD FOR A/S LONG, DAS KIMMITT, KELSO, QUINN, ANDERSON
CENTCOM ALSO FOR MAJ GEN FINDLEY, REYES, RODRIGUEZ
NSC FOR NRAMCHAND, EABRAMS

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SUBJECT: IRAQ AND IRAN KEY TOPICS IN MBZ MEETING WITH
ADMIRAL WILLIAM J. FALLON

REFS: A) ABU DHABI 1566, B) ABU DHABI 1479

Classified by CDA Martin Quinn, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: In a lengthy September 17 conversation, Admiral William J. Fallon, USCENTCOM Commander, and Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed (MbZ), Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces discussed the Iraq security situation and the necessity for Government of Iraq political progress to sustain recent positive trends. MbZ argued for caution against the long-term threat of extremist views and advocated moderate dialogue among Arab audiences. On Iran, MbZ offered an insightful assessment of the complex relationship with Iran, highlighted the missile threat and asked about the lease of Patriot systems while UAE procurement requests were under development. He said Iran's goals in the nuclear arena were likely irreversible, that UAE defenses should be arrayed against the threat, and that he worried about the influx of Iranian influence (people and investments) in the region. He did not anticipate an effectively coordinated GCC front against Iran. The UAE is committed to helping Lebanon restore its former calm, he stated, partly through recent security assistance. End summary.

Iraq: positive trends

¶2. (S) Admiral Fallon reviewed regional security with MbZ in a September 17 meeting that was conducted before and after a late Ramadan dinner in Abu Dhabi (the dinner was attended by about 200 local guests). MbZ inquired first about the situation in Iraq, which the Admiral characterized as constantly changing along generally positive trend lines. With some emphasis on his recent visit to Anbar Province, the Admiral said violence is down in Iraq, more Sunni are entering the security forces, Anbar is a safer place to move around, Sheikh Sattar's followers have declared their continued opposition to al-Qaeda, tribal alliances seem to be holding, there are visible signs of rebuilding in Ramadi and Falluja, and the fruits of reconciliation are evident in the receipt by Anbar authorities of \$70 million from the central government. Shi'a tribes are looking at the Anbar model, meeting together with Sunni tribal leaders, and separating themselves somewhat from Jeish al-Mahdi (JAM), he added. MbZ asked whether the USG had to press al-Maliki into giving the

\$70 million to Sunni-dominant Anbar, to which Admiral Fallon explained the U.S. did encourage them to do this

¶3. (S) Discontent in the U.S. regarding developments in Iraq stems partly from a perception that the Iraqi government could take control of the situation if it chose to do so, the Admiral noted, adding that the Iraqi people were enjoying increasing freedom to choose. Grass-roots pressures are building on the leaders in Baghdad to take more decisive action to calm the security situation; the need for better governance and less corruption is increasingly clear. Saddam had, unfortunately, made the country so dependent that it could not feed itself, yet with food being distributed and oil flowing, some senior politicians now recognize that people might seek alternatives to the Central Government if it does not reach out to the provinces. The "forcing mechanism" of grass roots pressure is beginning to bear fruit. The Admiral cited al-Maliki's quick reaction to unrest in Karbala in an effort to prevent a localized problem from becoming larger -- MbZ asked pointedly if the PM would have a similar reaction to unrest in a non-Shi'a part of Iraq.

¶4. (S) MbZ acknowledged positive trend lines in Iraqi security which will require time and patience to solidify. He looked forward to further improvement by next spring, calling for greater assistance to the Iraqi people and tighter control over JAM to show Iraq a good alternative to Iranian dominance.

Moderate dialogue to defeat extremism

¶5. (S) The Crown Prince cautioned that a "second tier" of
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al-Qaeda, beneath the level of the violent leadership, was recruiting followers to an extremist "Muslim brother" ideology. These people have influence in the mosques and schools, do well in free elections, and administer charities that cement relationships in the community. Stating that Iraqi VP Tariq al-Hashemi is a "Muslim brother," MbZ suggested the USG monitor the group's influence over the long term.

¶6. (C) MbZ characterized the content of a lecture which his dinner guests had received that evening from visiting former White House counter-terrorism official Richard Clark. Clark had cautioned the UAE to be on alert for an al-Qaeda that can strike at any place or time; one must prepare for the worst. The majority of Arabs do not support al-Qaeda, said MbZ, although support fluctuates by city and country. MbZ said it is important to get diverse audiences together to discuss issues (as he had done in the evening lecture) and to emphasize the value of moderate dialogue. He said Ramadan is a "super busy" time for him, during which such lectures were one of the benefits of the season. (Note: MbZ hosted former Iraqi PM Ayad Allawi at a similar event later the same week. End note.)

Iran: preparing UAE defenses

¶7. (S) Turning to the threat from Iran, MbZ asked if the UAE could lease air defense systems (PAC-3) in conjunction with the lengthy and cumbersome purchase process. Admiral Fallon said the mood in Congress appeared favorable for approval of requested arms transfers, but that existing air defense batteries were committed elsewhere. MbZ appreciated the USG pledge to separate UAE arms transfers from Congressional discussion of Saudi requests to avoid a "difficult situation" if Saudi programs are delayed in the approval process. He noted how UAE hopes of acquiring stinger missiles in the 1980's (to protect oil platforms) had been derailed by Qatari purchases of stingers from the Taliban. He did not want UAE defense needs to be collateral damage to a neighbor's indiscretions again.

18. (S) MbZ said he felt it was a matter of time before Tehran had nuclear weapons. Iran may indeed already have them, he opined, stating that he had no proof to that effect but that he worried about being unprepared; "we can deal with" UAE defensive needs if given some years to prepare. He reiterated that the UAE does not "want to be caught by surprise." Iran is determined, has much of the required technology, and may be close to its nuclear goals. He did not think the regime in Iran could amend its ways and demonstrate "good" international behavior as an alternative to its current course. He worried that Iran might put the West in a "catch 22" by playing on the nerves of a European country that might "blink" (and strike at Iran). He said the UAE had a limited role in either convincing Iran to shift its course or in convincing the West not to strike (and thus provoke) Iran. Such a scenario would force the UAE to respond, however, and it must plan for the "day after." He said many of his UAE compatriots were less concerned about an unpredictable neighbor which MbZ worried about considerably.

19. (S) The Admiral cited how North Korea had shifted its stance from confrontation to a calm approach when faced with economic pressure, a tack the USG sought to replicate with Iran. Changing behavior will require a combination of forces to build on internal pressures already obvious in Iran. A unified GCC stance would add significant pressure on Iran, emphasized Fallon, particularly if economic pressure were brought to bear in a concerted manner. MbZ said he had been impressed with the North Korean example at first, yet when he analyzed parallels to Iran he found three particularly vexing differences: 1) Iran has a history of Empire and desire for hegemony, 2) Iran is one of the five largest oil producers, and 3) Iran is in a much more complex neighborhood in which many corrupt nations suffer from fragile leadership. (Note: The UAE announced the establishment of diplomatic relations with North Korea, in a document signed by their respective UN perm reps in New York, the following day. See Ref A. End

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note.)

10. (S) MbZ said the UAE tried to control the "legal and illegal" flows of Iranians into the UAE, partly by restricting the number of visas issued per month (which he said was difficult in light of the magnitude of Iranian investment in the Emirates). UAE intelligence agencies advise the leadership not to act against Iranian "sleeper" cells in the UAE "without a request from an ally like the U.S." By leaving identified cells in place the UAEG can at least monitor them; if you remove them, "two more" are created as replacements. The UAEG is aware of some individuals, some companies, and "some visitors from California" working on behalf of Iran. It does not claim to know them all and worries that it does not know enough about Iranian investment funds in the GCC and elsewhere. He said UAE authorities knew of funds on the scale of \$10 billion that are managed on behalf of the Iranian regime by local GCC citizens who don't stand out due to their citizenship. He assessed that there were "seven or eight" such funds in the GCC, most managed by Shi'a loyal to Iran (with one or two helpful Sunni in the mix). A GCC citizen investing locally can avoid scrutiny that would accrue if funds were invested in Switzerland or New York, he said.

11. (S) MbZ said it was important to make a stand against Iran;. However, he did not anticipate a coordinated approach from the GCC. How does one convince the Qatari leadership to cooperate, for example, when it "sneaks" \$40 million through Egypt to Hamas and sponsors al-Jazeera broadcasts? In spite of the high threat that Iran poses to the GCC, leadership is lacking to stand together against that threat, suggested the Crown Prince.

Lebanon: Security cooperation

¶12. (C) Lebanon is a country that deserves to be stable, said MbZ, and all partners must "do our homework" to help return Beirut to the "good old days." The current leadership is made up of puppets controlled by outside forces, he analyzed. He was frustrated that Lebanon does not spend more to defend itself from Hizballah rather than letting Hizballah claim to be its defender. MbZ promised to share a list of UAE contributions to Lebanon.

¶13. (SBU) Note: The Prince's staff subsequently passed PolOff an accounting of UAE aid to Lebanon since 2000. The total figure for 2007 was \$62 million, with 2006 tallied at \$85 million. The aggregate total since 2000 was nearly \$200 million, divided between assistance from the Department of Finance, the Red Crescent, the Zayed Charitable Foundation, and the UAE Armed Forces (with the entire armed forces contribution of \$57 million listed as having been donated in 2007). End note.

¶14. (U) Admiral Fallon has reviewed this cable.
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